Figure 1—*The Land of Cockaigne* (1567) by Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

Paleo Diets and Utopian Dreams

BY ADRIENNE ROSE JOHNSON

"Life was good for our Paleolithic grandparents," recounts a 2001 diet book.[1] A 2013 diet laments that civilization has "transformed healthy and vital people free of chronic diseases into sick, fat, and unhappy people."[2] If everyone went Paleo, one dieter interviewed for this article explained, "the world would be a more beautiful, healthier place, and we all would be more healthy, better people."[3]

An estimated three million Americans currently follow some version of the Paleo diet, and Paleo books are among the bestselling titles within an already blockbuster genre.[4] At its most basic, Paleo diets reject agricultural products such as cereals and sugars for foods that could have been hunted or gathered—mostly high-fat, high-fiber meats and plants. In practice, "going Paleo" means everything from the ordinary to the outlandish.[5] On the latter end of the spectrum, some dieters avoid artificial light, eat raw beef, forsake shoes, practice bloodletting, engage in polyamorous sexual relationships, and "adopt a primal attitude," whatever that means.[6] For others, the diet is just that: a diet of mainly meat and vegetables (occasionally fruits

and legumes) adopted to lose weight or gain muscle. Most dieters practice Paleo to lose weight, but this "species-appropriate diet" allegedly cures more than a hundred ailments, ranging from Alzheimer's to anxiety, epilepsy to acne.[7]

Despite its popularity, the Paleolithic diet has received little scholarly attention. The diet is not merely a collection of weight loss manuals but a complex and controversial social movement indebted to a long history of primitivist nutritional counsel, divided by bitter philosophical splits, alternately mocked and praised by mainstream medicine. The whole weight loss narrative genre has much to offer an interdisciplinary study of utopia and, in particular, the caveman diet offers an embodied utopian practice embedded within a powerful story of an original, lost Paleolithic paradise.

But the caveman diet is more than a myth of a lost golden age and more than a handbook for weight loss: the diets are at once a manual for the body, the self, and society. Paleo diets have been heralded as the best "way of life," a "revolution," and, most important, the "first glimpse of a new and better world."[8] The Paleo diet differs from most self-help literature by linking corporeal and social transformation, enlisting the body to measure and materialize the processes of recouping the utopia within. These diets uphold social dreams with shared origins (in the cave), a collective problem (the obesity epidemic), and common ends (health for all). As the 2013 *Paleo Manifesto* puts it, the diet aspires "to understand where we come from, to make the best of where we are, and to craft a better future."[9]

The caveman diet mixes myth and manual to create a new and different type of embodied utopia. Traditionally, body utopias are modeled after the old, medieval model of binging and reckless overindulgence. Imagine paintings like Bruegel's 16th century *The Land of Cockaigne (left)*: peasants, passed out on cobbled streets, stuffed to the gills with meat pies and puddings and sausage. Or the carnival fantasy of the 16th century novels *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel (right)* and their visions of grotesque, celebratory excess. But the Paleo diet today represents a radical departure from this older model—slow, moderate, nuanced, delicate experiences of appetite and natural flavor.

The story is told like this: Since agriculture is such a recent invention on the timeline of human evolution, "our genes are still in the Stone Age," and we must follow "what our ancient ancestors ate" to recapture "our natural birthright of health."[10] We are "literally Stone Agers living in the Space Age" and time has sped too fast for our bodies to adapt.[11] Ill-adapted and clumsy in this strange new world, our modern bodies have become sick, fat, and stressed. In this narrative, the Paleo diet situates the individual body in the long, deep currents of human history, suggesting that the body is on loan from history and obliged to the future—and only one's own property for a short-lived half-blink of evolutionary time.

The Caveman Diet Subgenre, or, "Bread Is the Staff of Death"

Western weight loss literature has a long tradition of venerating "primitive" diets and ways of life. Since the 19th century, influential American diet reformers conjectured about the diets of pre-agricultural peoples and recommended these "natural" foods to cure ailing moderns. In the 1890s, Dr. Emmet Densmore popularized a meat-heavy diet inspired by the "food of primal man," claiming that "bread is the staff of death" and "imbecility, decrepitude, and premature death go hand in hand

Figure 2—Gargantua from François Rabelais' satircal novels.

with luxury and plenty."[12] "Primitive" diets were not restricted to Densmore's "anticerealism" or the low-carb cause.[13] Throughout his long life, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943) also speculated on "the ways and likings of our primitive ancestors of prehistoric times" to support his diet of grains and other farinaceous (starchy) foods.[14]

Known by many different names—the caveman, Stone Age, evolutionary, primal, or hunter-gatherer diet—Paleolithic diets have also long been bound into larger political and social visions. In his time, Kellogg's anti-masturbation crusades and suspected pantheistic sunflower worship won him greater fame than his cereals. In 1975, Dr. Walter Voegtlin was the first to publish a full-length diet book explicitly modeled after theories of Paleolithic nutrition—his self-published *The Stone Age Diet*—but Paleo leaders today have largely disavowed Voegtlin for his white supremacist, eugenicist, and generally unpalatable politics. Bizarrely, Voegtlin recommended the mass slaughter of tigers, dolphins, and other carnivores.[15] "Will [dolphins] be eliminated, or will man?" Voegtlin asked his readers, gesturing toward an apocalypse in which dolphins, fat on fish, overrun the world with their well-fed populations.[16]

Disagreeable or eccentric views like these dominated discussions of the "caveman diet" until the January 1985 *New England Journal of Medicine* article on Paleolithic nutrition advancing the "evolutionary discordance hypothesis" by S. Boyd Eaton and Melvin Konner, both distinguished medical doctors with anthropological training.[17] The discordance or "mismatch" hypothesis theorizes that the clash between "ancient body and modern world" produces obesity, diabetes, and the other "diseases of civilization" or, as they are sometimes called, diseases of affluence, longevity, environment, or lifestyle.[18] Eaton and Konner argued that since "the human genetic constitution has changed relatively little since the appearance of truly modern human beings, *Homo sapiens sapiens*," pre-agricultural diets provide the "nutrition for which human beings are in essence genetically programmed."[19]

Specifically, Eaton and Konner advanced two important and controversial claims that still provide the theoretical backbone of the Paleo movement today. First, they argued divisively that the human body has remained essentially unchanged since the Paleolithic era.[20] Second, they cited evidence that pre-agricultural people were, on average, "six inches taller than their descendants who lived after the development of farming," to argue that the "invention of agriculture" led to poor health.[21] Effectively, Eaton and Konner were refuting the "nasty, brutish and short" critics who cited brief Paleolithic life expectancy (roughly estimated from 20 to 40 years) to argue that Paleolithic people died before they could contract the diseases of civilization, usually chronic degenerative conditions accompanying old age or "senescence."[22]

Eaton and Konner's views generated great controversy in the late 1980s and are still fiercely debated in medical, anthropological, and evolutionary scholarship and the popular press (see *Figure 2*). Yet a holistic plan of Paleolithic nutrition did not coalesce until 2002, when Dr. Loren Cordain published *The Paleo Diet: Lose Weight and Get Healthy by Eating the Foods You Were Designed to Eat*, now considered the cornerstone of the Paleo movement. As Cordain contends, "The term Paleo has become a household word since the publication of my first book."[23] In 2006, Mark Sisson created his Paleo blog, with the "mission…to change the lives of ten million people"; the site now receives an estimated 2.5 million unique visitors in Web traffic every month.[24] By 2009, the Ancestral Health Society officially organized to offer a "new direction in physiology that respects our heritage as human beings."[25] Just recently, Google announced that Paleo was the most searched for diet in 2013, even as *U.S. News and World Report* ranked the controversial diet last on its list "Best Diets Overall."[26]

What is a Paleo Utopia?

Utopian scholarship provides valuable insight into the meaning and practice of caveman diets. Lyman Tower Sargent has noted that "utopia is a tragic vision of a life of hope."[27] Mythic utopias create an "inevitable dialectic of hope, failure or at least partial failure, despondency and the rejection of hope, followed in time by the renewal of hope."[28] We can "hope, fail, and hope again," living out what Sargent calls "the dialectic [that] is part of our humanity."[29] And, indeed, the caveman diet speaks to the literature and practice of this dialectic: of hope and failure, of the quest for ideal health and the inevitability of our mortality, of the desire to escape time and our certain incorporation into its currents.

Paleo diet books also reveal a different and more equitable utopian vision of cavepeople gender relations, contradicting popular culture representations of the caveman as a belligerent thug. By contrast, Eaton et al.'s *The Paleolithic Prescription* that explicitly challenge the "sexist images about our

'caveman' past: Alley-Oops [who] drags Betty-Boop (or whomever) along by the hair," by arguing for a "more balanced theory" of cavepeople gender relations.[30] Eaton et al.'s vision of Paleolithic times upholds the "complementary roles, not dominance," of "Woman the Gatherer" and "Man the Hunter." "Women can and should have it all," the authors claim: "They were meant to, and did so for most of the time people have been on earth."[31] Yet the actual body ideal is similarly restrictive: merely swapping the slender ideal for the strong one. As one Paleo diet book puts it, the cavewoman "might look like a supermodel, but not a skinny, starved waif—more Cindy Crawford than Kate Moss."[32]

Surprisingly, the Paleo diet also advances a vision of racial parity. Without close analysis, the language of shared ancestry and biological uniformity could intimate a racist vision of the *Übermensch*. However, the vast scale of the Paleo narrative suggests otherwise. From the zoomed-out perspective of the grand narrative of human evolution, the individual differences of race, color, and national origin blur and become trivial. Cordain insists that "we're all the same. We've all got the same basic human genome, shaped by more than 2 million years of evolution."[33] Another author insists that, since tigers do not eat grass and rabbits do not eat meat, dieters must identify first as human beings, asking themselves, "Is this food natural for *human beings*?"[34] Another vivid passage argues that "humans show very little difference in the basic structure and function of the digestive system among racial groups."[35] When *Homo sapiens sapiens* are compared with rabbits and dogs, people look more similar than different—and this large-scale categorization of humans as hairless bipedal mammals, together with the spirit of the Paleo vision, contributes to a dream of equality and human unity.

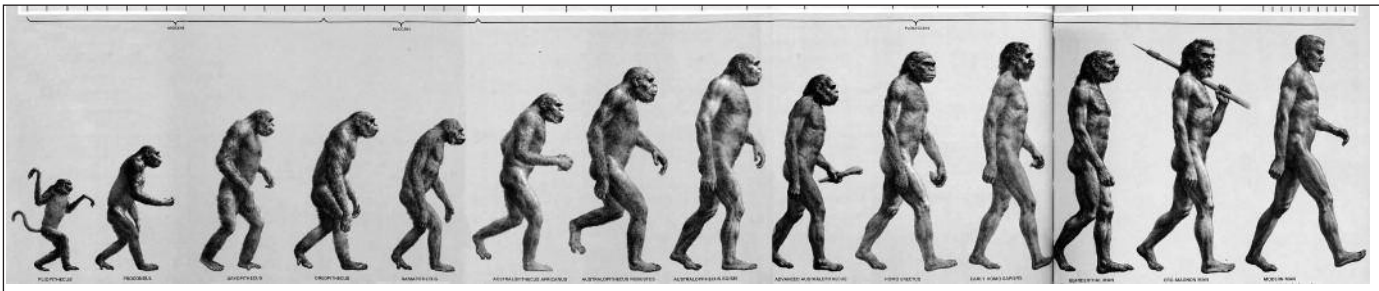
Leaders also insist that Paleo is not merely an individual plan for self-improvement but a collective solution to a species-wide health crisis, broadly defined. This logic suggests what James Kopp has called a "medical utopia," a vision that intertwines political thought with public health, demonstrating how the improvement of an individual's health creates a better society.[36] Health, in this sense, encompasses the health of the body and the body politic, most often emphasizing the leisure, kinship, decommodified "natural" economies, and equitable gender relations of the revitalized Paleo society.

The link between body and world is often more fanciful than factual, but Paleo leaders insist better body makes a better world, the improving self creates an improved society, personal and social transformations go hand in hand. The Paleo Foundation claims: "We envision a healthier world. … We firmly believe that the Paleo Movement holds the key to changing the world."[37] More specifically, the Paleo Foundation describes the "key" as "supporting better animal husbandry practices," incentivizing "sustainable farming," and offering "continuous education."[38] Others are political: one Paleo business insisted that its vision "incorporates a conscious effort to improve our social, economic and environmental wellbeing" by raising "awareness about the health benefits of the Paleo Diet while increasing access to locally produced wild and grassfed food."[39] Other Paleo practices incorporate political activism: primarily, the vituperative campaigns to legalize raw or nonpasteurized milk and abolish American farm subsidies of grains.[40]

Many dieters also refer to environmental or social imperatives, explaining that their diet fulfills a "moral obligation" to the planet and fellow human beings.[41] One diet author dedicated her book to "my children…their unborn children, and those generations to come."[42] And one dieter told me that she "went Paleo" because "we are in a crisis point with the planet, with environmental sustainability," equating, as *Primal Cuisine* does, "sustainable body, sustainable earth."[43] Though most experts agree that "the environmental impacts of meat" degrade water and soil, Paleo dieters refute these claims by blaming grain-fed livestock and monocultural agricultural methods—not "natural" Paleo free-roaming foraging animals and wild plants.[44]

Myths of Human Origins and the Paleolithic Paradise

If the body harbors this Paleolithic heritage of health within it, what exactly does the alternative caveman society look like? And when is the Paleolithic period situated in this mythic chronology of human evolution? Most Paleo leaders adhere to the scientific timeline of the roughly 30,000-year period from when humans evolved in 40,000 B.C.E. to the invention of agriculture in 10,000 B.C.E.[45] One blogger reconciles creationism and evolution by calling Adam and Eve the "Father and Mother of the Paleo Diet," a view echoed in the 2011 *Original Thin* and even Eaton et al.'s first book.[46] Another Paleo author places ancient Paleo before "Biblical Times" and "American Indians," "Yoga," and "Large city or town," along with other historical reference points. [47]



(Above) Figure 3—The original iconic "March of Progress" illustration published in 1965 as a fold out by Time-Life Books in their *Early Man* volume. (Right) Figure 4—a satirical Paleo Diet take on the famous sequence.

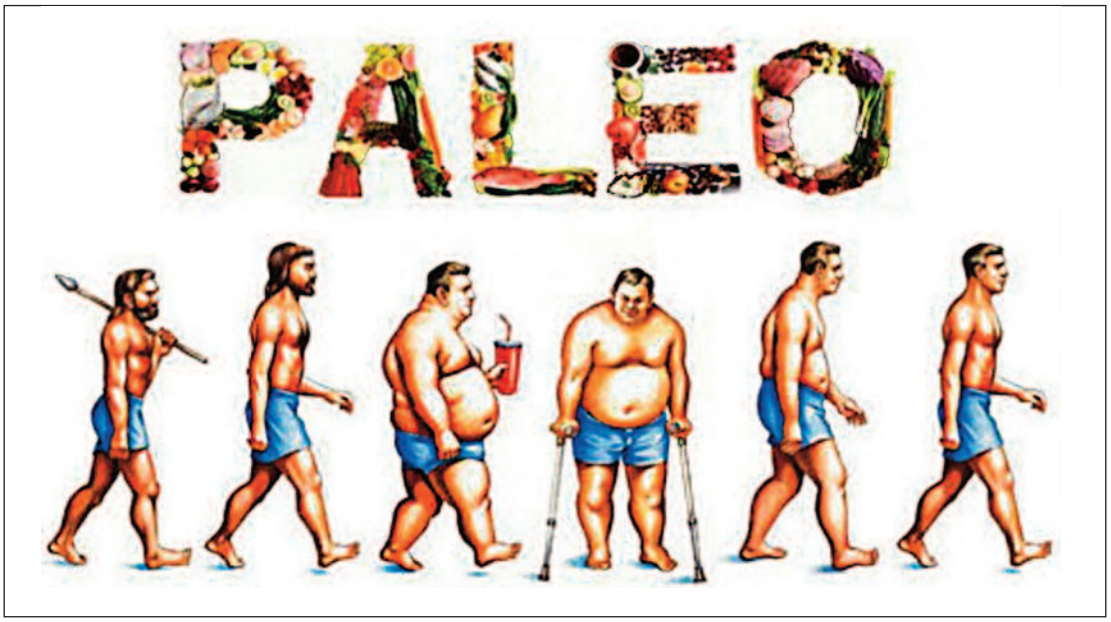
Many Paleo books represent the ascent-descent-promise-of-utopia story by riffing on the famous "March of Progress" illustration that depicts 25 million years of human evolution from left to right**.** Rather than showing a consistent ascent, Paleo diets often reinterpret the image to show *descent* from our ancient ancestors, usually illustrating this decline with an image of a pot-bellied, feminized contemporary man holding a hamburger in one hand and a soda in the other. Yet these parodies use the obese contemporary man as a turning point in the descent-ascent story; he symbolizes the rock-bottom situation and so acts as a fulcrum for a healthy past and a healthy future. Only Paleo dieting will realize the promise of a healthy future and regain mankind's original strength.

Despite variation in *when* humans lived as healthy cavepeople, *what* this paradise looks like is more or less the same across texts. In most caveman diets, "our ancestral homeland" is a prehistoric dreamland characterized by health, community, friendship, and a natural division of leisurely labor. Some diets advance more esoteric visions of primitive justice, denounce slavery, or, in the tradition of the jeremiad, see our fallen obese state as punishment for prior misdeeds. Most, however, envision our caveman past as Eaton et al. do in their 1988 *Paleolithic Prescription*. The authors encourage the dieter to "suppose for a moment that you and your family" lived long ago, "back through unimaginable lengths of time…not just to Noah and Adam but to a place and time 40,000 years ago."[48] This time travel returns dieters to a pre-Edenic life of "closeness and interdependence" abounding with "talking, arguing, laughing, and playing."[49] The authors describe a day filled with sweet honey, beautiful women, and abundant feasts, and, when the sun sets, "at last only the sound of a healer playing a stringed instrument and singing plaintive songs gives voice to the deep quiet of the night."[50]

Imagining us back in our hunter-gatherer shoes (or bare feet), Sisson asks, "How did they fill a typical day?" He describes "a life of physical challenge but ample leisure…living by the natural ebb and flow of lightness and darkness, season to season." In their "vast amounts of leisure time," "children would play. Babies and toddlers would nurse." At night, Sisson explains, "they would sing. Many would dance. Other nights might bring well-known and welcome stories around the intimacy of a fire circle. Beyond the circle there would be little to watch on most nights but the stars and the dim silhouette of a darkening landscape, the nearby sound of the wind in the grasses and, in the distance, calls of animals."[51]

Even hunting—a very unusual utopian feature—is tinted with a rosy glow.[52] After instructing the reader to "imagine yourself travelling back in time—far back," *Paleo Diet—Good or Bad?* describes a bison hunt in loving detail. Unlike with the "fowls that fly ready-roasted" in Bruegel's Land of Cockaigne, *Paleo Diet—Good or Bad?* recounts how, after "everyone sits down to eat," "you take out meat from the bison's body and roast it on fire…a delicious well-balanced meal is served and everyone gets his share."[53]

Leisure and family are foremost in many of these social dreams, which, as we will see, encompass both a relaxed social structure and a larger dream of economy based on "natural" evaluations of value. As Sargent noted, literary utopias look "to the past of the human race" and are portrayed as "achieved without human effort. They are a gift of nature or the gods."[54] Indeed, the diets often emphasize how nature bestows an effortless economy, claiming that "life was more leisurely and less stressful, the human bodies were naturally fit," in caveman times.[55] Many dieters prefer the term *play out* to *work out*, as Paleo "playful and primal movement" exercise is reframed as a leisurely, fun way to express the body's natural desire to move.[56]



Some diets venerate hard work even as they promise cave-like leisure, often couched in the language of the social cohesion of original Paleo tribes. "They worked hard, but had ample time for leisure activities," proclaims the 2001 *Origin Diet*. "During their extended 'weekends,'" the story continues, "they became artists, painting caves with some of the world's finest pictures. They made elaborate jewelry to adorn their bodies. They sculpted flutes, played music and danced at parties."[57] *The Origin Diet* describes the familial intimacy of hunter-gatherer society, remembering how their "lives centered around family and community" and "elders were honored for their wisdom" by children sitting around "the campfire at night to hear stories."[58] The 2010 *Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet* combines comradeship and leisure, describing human ancestors as "early to bed, early to rise, and lots of adventure. … [T]hey had a strong social network, a sense of belonging, variety in their work and, really, not that much drudgery."[59]

Before promising that "weight loss just so happens to be a side effect of health and vitality," *Living Paleo for Dummies* paints an even more vivid picture: "So how did our ancestors live? They enjoyed a balanced life of working, playing, relaxing, and worshipping…. The kids laughed, played, and sang by the fire, and adults enjoyed conversation as they made plans for the next day. They felt closeness to one another and everyone had purpose."[60] Passages like these suggest how many Paleo diets do not seek to simply recapture the caveman's health but, rather, an entire healthful worldview that produced such community, beauty, and joy.

The Body Utopia and Recalibrating the Pleasures of Paucity

One Paleo diet book asks, "What does this history mean to you?"[61] How does the body recapture its essential Paleolithic nature? We must turn to the body to recognize the bearing of the story on the practice, the book on the body, or the myth on the manual. The "original human diet" offers an education of instinct and a deliberate, guided return to an intuitive sense of the body and its needs. Intuition no longer comes naturally—it must be taught. Since the diet authors claim that "the modern commercial world is leading our natural animal instincts astray—tempting us, teasing us, ensnaring us," the diet promises to repair the damage "to our innate sense of what's right for us."[62] Put another way, "the main 'trick' is to retrain your body; teach it to become more instinctive."[63]

In his 1975 *Stone Age Diet*, Voegtlin distinguished between hunger and appetite, a distinction that continues to serve the Paleo community. Voegtlin claimed that hunger is a purely "physiological mechanism" but appetite is an "acquired social endowment, a *conditioned* reflex."[64] Voegtlin and his colleagues promise that caveman diets bypass the construct of appetite so that the dieter can recognize hunger and, once again, eat intuitively. For the "one million or so years before [man] began to acquire the doubtful assets of civilization," Voegtlin wrote, "it is certain that nature also gave him a similar innate wisdom to choose foods best suited for his digestive tract."[65] After regaining true hunger, the dieter will naturally appease hunger with "whole" or "real" foods,

effortlessly discerning what is *good* from what is *valuable*.

When dieters learn how to identify natural hunger, they also learn to reject older versions of utopias characteristic of the Bakhtinian carnival or Land of Cockaigne. Unlike those medieval peasant binges, Paleo utopias venerate the restrained appetite by redefining pleasure: as the 2013 *Cavewomen Don't Get Fat* promises, Paleo foods offer a "calming, sustained sense of satisfaction," not the rash rush of a food bender.[66] The difference between medieval and modern versions of food utopias makes sense: both work by contrast. The hungry are offered indulging with reckless abandon and the overfed are offered restrained pleasures. In fact, the word *Cockaygne* comes from the Latin *coquina*, or "cooking," and "abundant and easy food" characterized many early utopian tales, often born from hardship.[67] Just as privation once produced the "Land of Plenty" with "plenty of food and drink," now the Land of Plenty is producing fantasies of paucity.[68]

This vision of the restrained body utopia is typical of the alternative food movement: slow foods, urban farming, farmers' markets, and even Michelle Obama's victory gardens are cloaked in the rhetoric of restrained, moderated, and educated desires. As Madden and Finch note, the Slow Food movement "defend[s] 'quiet material pleasures' as the only effective antidote to the 'universal folly of the Fast Life.'"[69]

Both utopias—medieval abandon and modern restraint—are particularly appealing to the poor. Class distinctions still persist in utopian foodways: like the underfed peasant, the overfed poor today illustrate the enduring relationship between body size and poverty. Ironically, the rich build immunity to this "disease of affluence" with Pilates classes and arugula salads, while cheap fast food and desk jobs dispose the poor to obesity. The Paleo diet still maps onto the Land of Cockaigne, however, in its reputation for expensiveness. Grass-fed meats, organic produce, and raw nuts all rack up the grocery bill, many complain, but diet authors compare the cost of Paleo foods with that of later medical expenses. "Is it more expensive?" asks the *EasyPaleo* blog. "Yes, real foods will cost you more than fake foods," but buying Paleo foods will be "saving yourself from the inevitable medications, supplements, and even hospital bills that are looming in your future."[70]

The sensuous pleasures of food, so dramatized in the Land of Cockaigne, are also reconceptualized in the caveman diet as tricks of the wily food industry.[71] "Foods in flashy wrappers are attractive, sweet and tempting," cautions the 2013 *Paleo Diet*.[72] Extreme "foods that are sweet, salty, full of refined sugar, chemicals, and artificial flavors" lead only to "cheap food thrills," warns the 1985 *Dr. Berger's Immune Power Diet*.[73] Loren Cordain blames the "starchy gut bombs" of "artificial foods laced with unnatural combinations of fat, carbohydrates, salt, and sugar" for making "Americans the fattest people on earth."[74] Or as Walter Voegtlin expounded: "Our foods are chemically preserved, sweetened, colored, and flavored; they are canned, dehydrated, frozen, pasteurized, Fletcherized, fortified, ground, juiced, instantized, Osterized, precooked, prepackaged, puréed, pickled, salted, strained, and swallowed whole."[75] These methods of preparation dupe the body into craving fake flavors—extremes of salty, sweet, or that sneaky blend of both: the Snickers bar.

Industrial food production has curdled the land of milk and honey. "The food industry is a multibillion dollar machine…full of addictively fake foods," warns the 2013 *77 Ways to Reshape Your Life*. It continues, "But you need to ask yourself 'Would this food be available to a cave man?'"[76] If not, chances are that the modern food will dupe the body into mistaking deliciousness for goodness. Since humans are so easily hoodwinked by artificial flavors, the diets suggest that the traditional body utopias of abandon no longer work in the modern world. Rather than relishing in an abundance of delights, the dieter would wind up binging on Doritos and Diet Coke.

Only natural foods can reteach the palate to recognize value: in Cordain's words, dieters must welcome the "return of your palate as Mother Nature always intended it to be."[77] With an educated palate, the body—not the industrial food system or the larger economy—determines value for itself. Cordain explains the process, assuring the dieter that "as you gradually wean yourself from salty, sugary, and starchy foods, your taste buds will become attuned to the subtle flavors and textures of wonderful real foods."[78]

Foods become "real," or, perhaps, decommodified, when the palate develops sensitivity to whole foods. These "evolutionary" or real foods gain value—not from their position in the economy but from their relationship to the human body. The stomach biologizes the value of foods: for example, *The Everything Paleolithic Diet Book* reevaluates berries for their ability to lower blood pressure, not for their extreme flavors or cost per pound.[79] The dieter, then, learns to use instinctual corporeal recognition of foods that are *good*; taste is both educated away from reckless delights and stripped of the social construction of value.

Maybe, One Day: The Caveman Utopia

"Is this you?" *Dr. Gundry's Diet Evolution* asks readers: "Your skin is clear and unwrinkled, your slim body moves with ease and grace, and you're blessed with strength, stamina, and good health."[80] Did the diet "help you become a happier and kinder person," as the 2013 *Cavewomen Don't Get Fat* promises?[81] Or did it restore the Paleolithic world of family, intimacy, and belonging that Eaton et al. describe? Or as they later ask, "Is it possible, then, to emulate the past?"[82]

In a word: no.

"Possibility and failure will forever be joined at the hip," Joseph Winters argues in his study of utopia. "Hope and promise, no matter how radical, cannot escape the indelible human realities of death, suffering, and discord," he continues, and utopian projects "incorporate a sense of the tragic quality of

existence."[83] Cavemen dieters aspire for ancient health but do so tragically, accepting that they can never revive what has always already been lost. "Unless the wooly mammoth is magically resurrected, it would be impractical, if not impossible," to eat as did our Paleolithic ancestors, the *Alpha Male Challenge* admits.[84] "You will not be scavenging meat from other predators. But, your shopping cart may be filled differently," *The Foundation Diet* continues, compromising the grand view of history down to the contents of a shopping cart.[85]

One Paleo dieter told me in an interview, after trying dozens of diets and embarking on a new one, yet again: "You still think 'maybe,' you just think 'maybe'—maybe I can, maybe one day, maybe it will work this time."[86] Others share this optimism: an estimated 45 million Americans still spend $33 billion on weight loss products every year and choose among roughly 25,000 diet books.[87] Nearly all of these 45 million Americans fail to lose weight or ward off weight regain.

Why try and fail, and try again, if failure is nearly certain? The answer, of course, lies in the extraordinary power of hope—regardless of the failures it may produce—to enrich the imagination and give meaning to the world. Eventually, mortality overwhelms any endeavor to get and keep health—no matter how assiduous the dieter or promising the plan. Yet the final failure of the caveman diet suggests that our hopes may be deferred by the diet, but they are never defeated; we are never perfect but forever perfectible.

In the end, then, the caveman diet is less concerned with losing weight than with creating a better world. This is what makes the caveman diet a utopia. We need, however unattainable, the social dreams of original goodness and faith in the future, all bound in Sargent's utopian dialectic of hope and failure. "Risen apes or fallen angels," *The Paleo Manifesto* concludes, "we walk tall with eyes forward—one foot firmly planted on the ground of what we are, the other reaching into the future of what we can become."[88] And though we aspire for this future, the present pivots on that same firmly planted metonym of the foot. It is this foot—that banal, bodily thing—that reminds us of the cavemen we come from and the world we hope to create. S

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5. Though diets often borrow scientific terminology such as *Neanderthals*, *Cro-Magnons*, and *troglodytes*, most use the term *caveman* to evoke cultural meaning rather than scientific taxonomy. This essay uses *caveman* to draw upon this constellation of cultural meanings and *Paleo* in reference to specifically "Paleo" books published in the wake of Loren Cordain's *The Paleo Diet: Lose Weight and Get Healthy by Eating the Food You Were Designed to Eat* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002).
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20. For an excellent summary of the scholarly consensus refuting (or at least debating) Eaton and Konner's claims, see evolutionary biologist Marlene Zuk's *Paleofantasy: What Evolution Really Tells Us About Sex, Diet, and How We Live* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013). Zuk's discussion of "experimental evolution" is particularly pertinent (67-92) to arguments discrediting the "stalling" or "peaking" of evolutionary processes in the Paleolithic era.
21. Eaton and Konner, "Paleolithic Nutrition," 284. This figure was later corrected in the April issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The editors amended the "six inches" to "12.2 cm (4.8 inches)," but the correction was largely unnoticed, and most Paleo books still neglect the April 1985 correction.
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52. Of Sargent's eight characteristics of mythic utopias, the paradise described in the caveman diet only violates this feature: "no enmity between homo sapiens and the other animals" (Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 [1994]: 10). Not only do cavemen regularly hunt (usually big animals with spears or arrows), but animals are also described as similarly terrorizing human prey in the "eat or get eaten!" predacious world: Sisson, Mark. 2012. *The Primal Blueprint: Reprogram Your Genes for Effortless Weight Loss, Vibrant Health, and Boundless Energy.* Malibu, CA: Primal Nutrition, Inc., 14.
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70. Jennie Harrell, "Is Paleo Expensive?" *EasyPaleo* (blog), January 28, 2012, http://www.easypaleo.com/2012/01/28/is-paleo-expensive-my-thoughts-money-saving-tips/.
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88. Durant, *Paleo Manifesto*, 290.